

Interview between David Prever and Clare Merrills

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Prever: I'm David Prever at HMRC, talking today to Clare Merrills about Tax Credits and how important it is that you notify HMRC to any change in your circumstances. Hello Clare, nice to talk to you.

Merrills: Hiya.

Prever: Let's start at the very beginning. Who's entitled to Tax Credits in the first place?.

Merrills: Well actually there's, there's two types of Tax Credits that people could be entitled to. There's the Child Tax Credit and the Working Tax Credit. Now the Child Tax Credit is paid to families or individuals with at least one child or a young person that they're responsible for. And the Working Tax Credit is support that's given to workers who are on a low income, and they could claim even if they don't have children.

Prever: Why do you think it is Clare that, and I know we all lead very busy lives, but why do you think it is that we sometimes forget to tell HMRC when our circumstances have changed?.

Merrills: I think it boils down to exactly what you've just said, that people do live very, very busy lives and if you, if you're circumstances have changed well quite honestly you're more interested in that change in your life than you are in telling us, but I really can't reiterate enough how important it is to tell us because we need to ensure that your Tax Credits are right.

Prever: And when we talk about a change in circumstances you're talking about any change in your relationship status or your working status. Those are the main areas are they?.

Merrills: Okay well the sorts of different things that you'd need to tell us about if your circumstances have changed are, for example if you've had a new baby or one of your children leaves full-time education, to get a job or to go to university, maybe your job's changed and you're getting more money, or you've got a new partner and, and you've moved in together so that the family income has actually gone up. All these different types of things you need to let us know about as soon as they happen.

Prever: So, let's talk about what happens if I don't tell HMRC about changes. What can go wrong?.

Merrills: Well if you don't tell us that your circumstances have actually changed, then your Tax Credits won't change with that to reflect what your circumstances actually are. For example you could end up being paid too little, because if for

example you have had a new baby you're possibly going to be entitled to more money, so you need to let us know straight away so that we can make sure that you're getting all that extra money you need at the time when you need it. But also if your circumstances change that your income goes up then you need to let us know that because your Tax Credits will probably need to go down and what we don't want is a situation where, at the end of the year, you end up owing us lots and lots of money.

Prever: Getting in touch with any sort of official organisation or official body can be quite daunting at times. How do you get in touch with HMRC to tell us that your circumstances have changed?.

Merrills: Well if your circumstances have changed, for example maybe you've got a new partner, you've moved in together or maybe you've got a new job and your income's gone up, the most straightforward way of contacting us is through our helpline number, and that's open between 8.00am and 8.00pm everyday except for Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day. Just give us a call on 0845 300 3900 and we'll be able to sort that all out for you.

Prever: The number again is 0845 300 3900. If I call that number what are you going to need? What information do I need to have to hand to tell you?.

Merrills: What you need to have to hand is obviously your name. We ask for a daytime telephone number as well and we will ask you for your reference number that you have, and that will be on all the paperwork that you get from us, every time your circumstances change we will send something out to you, and you'll be able to get the reference number off there and your National Insurance number.

Prever: Let's talk about advice then specifically for parents. What tips have you got for parents, Clare?.

Merrills: I think that the best tip I could give them is that just let us know as soon as anything changes in your life because as soon as you tell us the sooner we can actually get everything changed for you, and if you are entitled to more money, we can get that money to you when you need it not later on.

Prever: Apart from the phone number which you've given us, where else can parents get some help?

Merrills: Well there's a really, really great page on our website at www.hmrc.gov.uk. When you get on there just click on to the Tax Credits pages and that takes you through everything you need to know about Tax Credits, who's entitled to it. You can even do a little calculation on there as well to work out how much you might be able to get.

Prever: This is just the sort of thing isn't it that people will forget to do. What other help can HMRC give to actually remind you that you need to get in touch?.

Merrills: Well we very, very often are running campaigns on the radio and the television just to nudge people to remind them that they need to do things, but also we do write to people regularly asking them to check at the end of the year that they've

been paid the right amount; were they actually entitled to any more; do they need to tell us of any changes? So we do get in touch with people quite a lot.

Prever: I think the biggest fear isn't it, is a worry that your payments might stop or might go down, and you're sort of reluctant to get in touch in case you're no longer entitled to what you think you might be entitled to. What advice can you give in those situations?.

Merrills: The most important thing for people to do is don't be frightened of contacting us. We want you to have the right amount of money at the right time and that means that the most important thing for you to do is to contact us as soon as anything's changed. As soon as you've got any queries about anything, give us a call and we can put your mind at rest. Please don't be frightened to contact us. We're totally human and we understand exactly the situation that people find themselves in, but you know they really, really must give us a call so that we can get everything right. We don't want people owing us money at the end of the year, and likewise we don't want to owe people money at the end of the year. We want people to have it when they're entitled to it, to make their lives better at that time.

Prever: And that's enough to make me pick up the phone. Thank you very much Clare, nice to talk to you.

Merrills: You're welcome.

Prever: That number once again, 0845 300 3900, it's open 8.00am to 8.00pm everyday except Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Years Day.